DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 401 CS 217 447


| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Smith, Carl B. |
| TITLE | How To Talk to Your Children about Books. |
| INSTITUTION | ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Bloomington, IN.; Family Learning Association, Bloomington, IN. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC. |
| ISBN | ISBN-1-883790-71-9 |
| PUB DATE | 2001-00-00 |
| NOTE | 91p.; Three additional booklets in this series (CS 217 448-450) offer advice to parents on selecting specific books for children in various age groups. |
| CONTRACT | ED-99-CO-0028 |
| AVAILABLE FROM | ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Indiana University, 2805 E. 10th Street, Suite 140, Bloomington, IN 47408-2698; Web site: http://eric.indiana.edu/. |
| PUB TYPE | Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- ERIC Publications (071) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC04 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Adolescent Literature; *Books; *Childrens Literature; Elementary Secondary Education; Family Literacy; *Parent Child Relationship; Reading Aloud to Others; *Reading Material Selection; *Reading Materials |



ABSTRACT

Acknowledging the problems with and the need for family communication, this booklet shows how increasing family reading can improve family communication and bring parent and child closer. It is not designed to teach a child how to read, but will show parents how to help their child become a better and more enthusiastic reader, by experiencing together first-hand the many pleasures and uses of reading. This "how-to" booklet includes easy techniques to prompt book discussions between parent and child; guidelines for selecting books; how to make it a two-way discussion; and deals with motivation, values, and how to make it fun. The first chapter shows parents how to use books to open up communication with their child. Chapter 2 talks about finding time to read, and chapter 3 discusses motivating a child. The last chapter discusses how to determine a child's interests and select books that will match those interests. A final set of guidelines brings together some of the most important points to keep in mind while reading to and with children: Guidelines for Reading Aloud with Children of All Ages; General Guidelines for Book-Sharing Conversations; and Guidelines for Action. (SR)



Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 450 401

# How to Talk to Your Children about Books

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

*by Carl B. Smith*

CS 217 447

ERIC

FAMILY LEARNING ASSOCIATION

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT BOOKS

by CARL B. SMITH, PH.D.

ERIC
Clearinghouse on English, Reading, and Communication

FAMILY LEARNING ASSOCIATION

*Published by*

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication
Indiana University, 2805 East 10th Street
Bloomington, Indiana 47408-2698
Carl B. Smith, Director
*and*
*The Family Learning Association*
3925 Hagan Street, Suite 101
Bloomington, IN 47401

Copyright ©2001 by The Family Learning Association

*Cover Design & Production Editor: Lanny Thomas*

ERIC (an acronym for **E**ducational **R**esources **I**nformation **C**enter) is a national network of 16 clearinghouses, each of which is responsible for building the ERIC database by identifying and abstracting various educational resources, including research reports, curriculum guides, conference papers, journal articles, and government reports. The Clearinghouse on **R**eading, **E**nglish, and **C**ommunication (ERIC/REC) collects educational information specifically related to reading, English, journalism, speech, and theater at all levels. ERIC/REC also covers interdisciplinary areas such as media studies, reading and writing technology, mass communication, language arts, critical thinking, literature, and many aspects of literacy.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-99-CO-0028. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

# ERIC/REC Advisory Board


**Douglas Barnard**
Associate Superintendent
of Instruction
Mesa Public Schools
549 North Stapley Street
Mesa, AZ 85203

**Joan Irwin**
Director of Publications,
International
Reading Association
PO Box 8193
Newark, DE 19711

**Jack Humphrey**
Director
University of Evansville
Middle Grades Reading Network
1800 Lincoln Ave.
Evansville, IN 47722

**Robert Pavlik**
Professor of English Education
Cardinal Stritch University
6801 North Yates Road
Milwaukee, WI 53217

**James Gaudino**
Executive Director, National
Communication Association
5105 Backlick Road, Building E
Annandale, VA 22003

**Lenore Sandel**
Editor, ASCD Whole
Language Newsletter
33 Sherman Avenue
Rockville Center, NY 11570

**Earlene Holland**
Associate Director, Office of
Program Development
251 East Ohio Street,
Room 229,
State House
Indianapolis, IN 46204

**Faith Schullstrom**
Executive Director, National
Council of Teachers of English
1111 W. Kenyon Road
Urbana, IL 61801

**Josefina Tinajero**
Director, Mother and
Daughter Program
University of Texas
500 West University Avenue
El Paso, TX 79968

# CONTENTS

Introduction ..... ix

**CHAPTER 1**
**Communicating with Your Child ..... 1**
Lessons to Live By ..... 1
Use Questions to Start Conversations ..... 3
Read the Same Book ..... 4
Values to Discuss ..... 6
Meeting on Neutral Territory ..... 9
Communication Is a Two-Way Street ..... 11
Every Parent Is a Model Parent ..... 12

**CHAPTER 2**
**Finding Time to Read ..... 15**
Communication Makes the Difference ..... 16
Times Have Changed ..... 18
Getting Started: Just Do It ..... 19
Set Aside Family Time ..... 20
Follow a Daily Schedule ..... 21
*Carpe Diem*: Seize the Moment ..... 22
Tomorrow Is Another Day ..... 29
Bridges to Cross ..... 29

**CHAPTER 3**
**Motivating Your Child ..... 33**
Look for a Model ..... 33
Bedtime Stories Aren't Just for Babies ..... 36

Keep on Reading to Your Child ..... 37
Tickle the Imagination ..... 38
Find Stories Your Kids Can Relate To ..... 39
Create Cliffhangers ..... 41
Use Competition ..... 43
Change Places ..... 43
Create Opportunities ..... 45
Solve a Problem ..... 47
Bridges to Cross ..... 49

**CHAPTER 4**
**Selecting Books ..... 51**
What Makes a Book Interesting? ..... 51
Match Your Interest ..... 53
Give Time and Attention ..... 54
Make Reading Fun ..... 55
Guide without Dominating ..... 57
Choosing the Right Books ..... 58
Inventory Interests ..... 60
The Right Choice Makes All the Difference ..... 62
If They Don't Pass the Acid Test, "Ditch 'Em" ... 62
Developmental Interests and Books ..... 65
Changing Tastes over the Years ..... 66
Putting It All Together ..... 68
Guidelines for Reading Aloud with Children of All Ages ..... 69
General Guidelines for Book-Sharing Conversations ..... 72
Guidelines for Action ..... 74

# Introduction

This is a book with stories to tell. The stories you will hear as you read the book have one thing in common: they all acknowledge the problems with and need for family communication. My own story gives us a place to start.

When my son was thirteen, he came home with a science-fiction book one of his teachers suggested that he might enjoy reading. My son loved science, but he hated to read. I think this clever teacher was trying to use his interest in science to lure him into reading. She had suggested the book *Dune* by Frank Herbert.

"Hey Dad," he said, "this book is about people who live on a desert planet. You know, no rain. How do you think they can survive?"

By a miracle, I thought—just like this miracle that has my son reading a big, hefty book. But I replied, "What an interesting challenge. How would you and I survive on a planet like that?"

"I don't know," he said. "I've only read a few pages. The back cover says that water is only one of their problems. Huge predators called 'sand worms' swim through the desert sand looking for people to snack on. Yum!"

"Wow!" I exclaimed. "Can I read the first chapter when you're finished?"

And so began the great adventure of a thirteen-year-old reluctant reader and his dad. Chapter by chapter we read about warring groups who fought to control the forbidding planet, Dune. Day by day, we retold and analyzed what we had read and tried to predict what would happen next. We checked out the science (mostly biology and some astronomy) that made it possible for human beings to live in an atmosphere where it no longer rained.

That was the beginning of a fresh chapter in our lives. With our shared reading of *Dune*, my son began to read more. More important, he and I began to talk more. Focusing on the *Dune* adventure gave us something besides our family relationship to discuss. Now I had something to say to him besides "Clean your room!" or "Be home by 9:00 or else!" And he didn't feel obligated to fight me for his independence. Instead, we were fighting pirate invaders together. We were speculating about the stirrings of young love. We were having a good time reading the same book. Our relationship changed significantly.

My son didn't become an avid reader, but he began to read more regularly, and we regularly shared a book. That's the simple program I mentioned—increasing family reading and thereby improving family communication. With my son, I had the advantage of

being a teacher trained in how to discuss books with kids. Now, after working with hundreds of families, I am convinced that all parents can share books with their kids if they have a little guidance.

## Benefits of Book Sharing

What you have in your hand is a "how-to" book. It isn't designed to teach your child to read, but it will show you how to help your child (whether she is three or thirteen) become a better and more enthusiastic reader. This book will help you guide your child toward a first-hand experience of the many pleasures and uses of reading. It will also guide you in your family conversations. The book-sharing strategies you will learn about here are designed to

- strengthen your relationship with your child.
- promote your child's intellectual and emotional growth.
- increase your child's self-esteem.
- improve your child's reading skills and classroom performance.
- help your child appreciate the value of recreational reading.
- enable you to become a more active participant in your child's education.

Because we know parents with children of varying ages and reading abilities will be using this book, we have tried to illustrate how you can use the information and strategies we present here with children of all ages—with toddlers who delight in picture books and with teenagers who love immersing themselves in science fiction or romance novels. If you put these

strategies to use in your own home, I am confident that you will discover the many benefits family book sharing can have for you and your children. One fifth-grader has summed up her feelings about sharing books with her mother by saying,

> *I think it has brought us closer. Now we can talk about the books we are reading...and I read a lot of them! We ask each other about books and we never did that before. It's just neat to have your mom interested in what you are reading and thinking about, and I like that she is reading things I like to read.*

I hope your family book sharing produces results as satisfying as those this youngster describes.

*—Carl B. Smith*
Bloomington, Indiana

12

# CHAPTER 1
# Communicating with Your Child

"I was afraid this idea of reading together and reading the same book would turn my daughter off. But it's been good for both of us. It allowed us to look at each other not as a child and a mother, but people who have opinions, and values, and expectations."

—*Barbara Putrich*

## Lessons to Live By

Take a moment to stop and consider the conversations you have with your child in a typical day. What do you spend the most time talking to your child about? Most parents spend a lot of time engaging their children in short conversations that begin with questions like "Did you brush your teeth?" "Was it you who forgot to clean up the kitchen after you fixed a snack?" "How can you say that you hate your little brother?"

If each of us spent a day listening to what we say to our children, we would probably discover that most of

our interactions with them are directive in nature. We spend a lot of time teaching them how to behave—how to take care of themselves and how to respect the rights and feelings of others. That's okay. After all, that is a parent's role. But unless we periodically have a chance to step outside our directive roles and relate to our children as thinking and feeling individuals, it's hard for us to discover how effective we are.

Generally our children seek independence outside the family—as they should. Unfortunately, as they keep stretching the limits of their family lifeline, we parents often put up our own barriers, and thus it becomes increasingly difficult for us to interact with our kids in a personal way. Even our questions at the end of a school day may sound a lot like those of a store clerk checking out school supplies:

- "What did you learn in school today?"
- "Do you have homework in math?"
- "Do you have any papers to show me?"

## Use Questions to Start Conversations

As a matter of record, those questions are important because they show that the parent values education. I am sure that teachers would rejoice if they thought that all parents were asking those questions at the end of each school day. But questions like that don't create conversations—that is, they don't create the kind of conversations that invite a child to talk about more than just her grade on a test or composition. We need to turn our questions and our conversations to those things that are truly important to our children, to things that invite them to confide their hurts and their joys. For example, an interested parent might ask

- "What did you learn today that excited you?"
- "Were there things that confused you? What can we talk about that might help?"
- "Did you read anything today that you would like to share with me? What is it that you like most about this story?"

These questions draw the child into a conversation filled with individual meaning. If a child wants to talk and he sees his parent as a good listener, that parent may receive a frank view of his child at that moment in time. At other times, the same child may walk away from his parent's questions without a word. Especially if a child believes that his parent is prying into matters he doesn't want to share or discuss, he may say nothing, or even express hostility.

Both parents and children sometimes need help figuring out how to communicate about the important

things in their lives. Perhaps parent and child have too much baggage standing between them to hold a good conversation, or perhaps there are topics that are too sensitive for them to just throw across the kitchen table. Or perhaps they have conversed so infrequently that they don't quite know how to bring each other into a conversation. It is often much easier for us to talk about someone else's problems than to talk about our own. That's exactly where family book sharing comes into the picture.

**TIP**

To get a good conversation started, ask about things that are important *to your child*. Avoid questions that sound like you are evaluating job performance.

## Read the Same Book

Have you noticed what happens to conversations when two people have read the same article or the same book? Their interest and energy perk up. They have a bond between them that leads them to describe what they like, to challenge ideas, to wonder aloud what will happen next. They no longer have to rely on shallow chatter: "How are you?" "Fine." "That's good." "Nice day." "Yeah, but it may rain later." They have the common ground of a book they both know and they get excited about exploring that common ground together.

When we talk about a book that we have both read, we can also escape the rigidity of the parent/child roles that often control our thinking. We don't have to represent the authority figure. We can just talk about our perceptions of the actions and ideas in the book. A child can do the same. Listen to Barbara Putrich as she reflects on an early book conversation that she had with her daughter:

> One of the first books we read together was *The Haunting of Francis Rain,* and it was really a fun book for us to share. Some of the discussions Gayle and I had about the books we read surprised me. I thought her opinions were much more adult than I had expected. We talked about the boy-girl relationships in the books and I was surprised at the maturity level at which Gayle approached them. I think both of us learned something about each other that surprised us. Gayle probably expected me to stand up for the parents in these books and, frankly, I expected Gayle to stand up for the kid all the time, but it wasn't that way. Gayle would talk about the things that the child did wrong and why she thought it was wrong. You hope that you teach your child values and right from wrong, but you're never sure if that's how things will turn out. What these types of conversations have done for me is reassure me that the things we have tried to teach Gayle are part of her and she pulls from that background or upbringing when she talks about these situations in books.

## Values to Discuss

Every parent feels the obligation to make sure her child can tell the difference between right and wrong behavior—to teach her child the value of honesty, self-respect, kindness, and hard work. Perhaps you also hold other values in high esteem and are committed to teaching your children how to use those precepts to guide their actions. As a way of bringing this issue into focus for yourself, take a moment to make a short (five or six items) list of the ethics and moral values you want your child to learn to live by.

Values to Guide Life:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

After you have made the list, consider how you can communicate these values to your child. For example, one parent reported that her daughter Melinda, age nine, had a friend with whom she had played for months. When a new girl moved into the neighborhood, the previous friend, Tina, seemed to disappear. Then one afternoon when Melinda was on the phone, the parent overheard her saying, "Tina, I have a girl friend. I can have only one special friend, and you're not it." Then Melinda hung up.

"What was that all about?" the mother asked. "Did you and Tina have a fight?"

What she learned was that there was no fight, but the new girl, who was attractive and seemed very self-confident, wanted Melinda as an exclusive friend. Melinda had to ignore or reject other friends if she wanted to keep this new friend.

"Melinda," the mother explained, "you don't need to hurt someone's feelings just because you no longer consider her your best friend. How would you feel if Tina did to you what you just did to her? Besides, what makes you think that you can't have more than one good friend?"

Well, it turned out that Melinda hadn't made that decision on her own. Her new friend had given her an ultimatum: she had to reject Tina or their friendship was finished.

"Melinda," the mother said, "a good friend doesn't ask you to hurt someone else to prove your friendship. More importantly, there is no reason at all that you can't have many good friends. For your sake and for Tina's sake, I want you to call her back to apologize for your unkind words."

Then the mother asked Melinda to set up an after-school work session in their home that would include Tina, the new friend, and at least one or two other classmates. They could work on a school project together and enjoy some refreshments. The mother felt that this kind of gesture would send a message to Melinda's new friend, as well as to Melinda. Shortly after the afternoon work session, the mother noticed that Melinda was on the phone frequently with Tina again, and she was also

making plans with other friends. The girl who had insisted on an exclusive relationship chose not to remain in Melinda's circle of friends.

Because Melinda's mother was alert and was willing to take action, she probably minimized the damage that these exclusive relationships can cause for children. *Children's books and young adult books recount many variations of Melinda's story:* making and losing friends is a part of every child's life. Melinda's mother might have used an incident in a book to help Melinda resolve her friendship problem. As it was, this mother seemed able to handle the problem in a straightforward manner because she respected other people's feelings and wanted her daughter to reflect on the values involved in her actions.

**TIP**

Stories in children's books often deal with the same situations your child faces in real life.

## Meeting on Neutral Territory

Engaging in regular book-sharing conversations can be a way of clearing some neutral ground on which you and your child can meet to discuss things that are important to both of you. It's a way for you to let your child know what you value, what ways of behaving you approve or disapprove of, without directing your comments at her or at her behavior. We are not suggesting that you use discipline as a primary way of conveying values to children, yet it is one means at your disposal. When you approach a behavior problem with calmness and objectivity, you show your child that her behavior has contradicted a value you want her to learn.

Family book sharing is a way of starting informal, positive conversations you can use to share your opinions and discuss those values you listed a few pages back. For instance, one father told us a story about reading the picture book *Chrysanthemum* with his daughter, Melissa. Chrysanthemum, the little mouse who is the book's main character, feels like she has an "absolutely perfect name" until she grows old enough to go to school. On her first day of school, Chrysanthemum's classmates make fun of her because she is named after a flower. Realizing that her name is different from the other children's, Chrysanthemum begins to feel that the name she thought was "absolutely perfect" is, in fact, "absolutely dreadful."

After the father and his daughter had read this story, they began to talk about what it means to be different and not to fit in. That conversation opened the way for Melissa to talk about how "some of the kids at school" made fun of the way a new boy in her class talked (the boy's family had just moved from

Mississippi to the small town in Indiana where the girl and her father lived). Melissa admitted that she, too, thought the new boy "was kind of weird." Reading and talking about *Chrysanthemum* gave the father a chance to share his own ideas about what it means to be tolerant of others.

Another parent pointed out how family book sharing opened new avenues of communication for her and her child:

> I think when we were sharing books, our relationship changed. There was less "telling" in our relationship—less "why didn't you do that?" and less "do this!" There was less abruptness in our conversations and relationship. Taking time for each other gave us time to relate to each other.

**TIP**

Characters in stories can suggest ways for your child to communicate more openly. Problems can be discussed through the characters; this can protect personal feelings.

## Communication Is a Two-Way Street

In order to understand our children, we have to try to understand how they feel. There are times when each of us hears only the content of our kid's conversation and thus we fail to tune into the feelings the child is trying to express. These feelings are often the main issue. Use *reflective listening* to bring that main issue of the feelings behind the message into the conversation. Relying on a simple strategy like rephrasing your child's statement can give both of you a chance to examine the feelings behind the words. Using this rephrasing technique will also reassure your child that you are actually understanding what he says. Consider this exchange:

**Son:** I hate Gary. He invited everybody to his party except me.

**Father:** Sounds like you really don't like Gary because he didn't ask you to his party.

**Son:** Well, no. I really like him because he was my best friend, and I wanted to go to his party.

**Father:** So your feelings are hurt and you are a little angry because you weren't invited to your friend's party?

At this point the conversation could go in many different directions, but the groundwork is laid for the father to understand some of the feelings his son is experiencing. By rephrasing his son's statements, the father invites the boy to elaborate on and talk more about his feelings. His father's active listening probably helped the son understand his own feelings better, too. A similar principle should prevail in book discussions: listen to your children and listen for their feelings as well as for the content of their statements. If your conversations are to be successful, each of you has to listen as much as he or she talks.

**TIP**

Reflective listening can help you discover the feelings behind the words. Simply rephrasing your child's statements can help to open up the conversation.

## Every Parent Is a Model Parent

We communicate with and influence our children not only by what we say but also by what we do. In many respects our actions speak louder than our words. This is really not surprising since, from the very beginning of their lives, children imitate what they see and hear. They learn to speak by imitating the speech around them, and they learn how to interact with others by imitating their parents. As your child's earliest and most influential teacher, you are continually setting an example for her to follow.

The parent who admonishes his child by saying "Do as I say, not as I do" is underestimating the powerful influence of his actions on his child's behavior and development. For instance, by letting your child see you read books, magazines, and newspapers, you let her know that reading is an enjoyable and worthwhile activity. When she sees important adults like Mom and Dad reading for fun, your child is encouraged to think of books and reading in positive ways.

We also communicate messages about books and learning by the things we put in our homes. A home that contains a variety of books and magazines lets

children know that reading is a regular way of communicating with other people and learning about the world. A home without books sends just the opposite message. You may feel that you can't afford to fill your home with books. But you don't need a large family income to provide your family with interesting reading materials. All you really need is a library card that will allow you and your children to borrow and bring home books from your local library.

As your child matures, book sharing can help you keep in touch with the person she is becoming. Sidenia Moses, a middle-school teacher who ran a family book-sharing program for her students and their parents, says that parents in her group especially appreciated this benefit of the program:

> At the end of one of our formal meetings, this father shared with the group that he felt this [family book sharing] had been the single most important way that he had gotten to know his daughter. He felt that discussing these books with his daughter had helped him to understand and attend to his eleven-year-old daughter. He realized that she was growing up, and he was concerned about her different thoughts as she grows older. This father shared that he and his daughter have a good relationship, but he was "looking ahead." He wanted to make sure that his daughter didn't stop communicating with him.

Family book sharing can also provide you and your child with a way to look ahead and forestall breakdowns in your close relationship.

# CHAPTER 2
# Finding Time to Read

> There wasn't enough quality time in our lives. This time that we spent together was the quality that we needed.
>
> —A mother

The philosopher George Santayana once said, "A child educated only at school is an uneducated child." In the last few years, American educators have echoed that message again and again. These educators have been insisting that parents can make a difference in their children's academic success by becoming actively involved in their kids' school work and school activities. In addition to increasing children's success in the classroom, educators say that parent involvement has these further benefits:

- Communication between home and school, parent and teacher, improves.
- Parents discover they do have the skills to help their children learn.

- As school becomes a shared experience, parents become closer to their children.

Young children generally take cues from their parents. If we are interested and actively involved in school and school activities, then our children are more likely to follow our lead and take a greater interest in their own school work. In the area of reading, parents have an especially powerful influence over their children's academic interest and achievement. We can send our children positive messages about reading just by keeping reading materials at home and by letting our children see us reading books, magazines, newspapers, comic books—whatever kinds of materials we find useful and enjoyable.

## Communication Makes the Difference

Most reading experts agree that parents can make a crucial difference in their children's educational progress (whether the child is five or fourteen) just by reading to and with them. Despite this fact, a recent government survey showed that only 35% of children aged 3-8 are read to regularly by their parents. Only one-third of American parents take time to read to and with their children!

By the time children reach the middle grades (ages 12-14), 90% of their parents have withdrawn from any conversation about school and books. That means that most parents do not talk with their children about one of the most important influences in those children's lives. During the critical transitional period from childhood to young adulthood—at a time when young people most emphatically need the reassurance and support of their parents and their community—a breakdown in family communication generally occurs.

As a result, parents become less of an influence on their children's teenage development. Regular family book sharing can be a way to keep the channels of communication open during this time when peer-group values tend to carry more weight than the opinions of parents and teachers do. Fifth-grader Leslie Bradford points this out when she says,

> Before we started this, my mom and I kept away from each other a lot. If I had questions about something, I might ask my mom, but I would ask my friends, too. They would say something entirely different from what my mom said. This sometimes caused trouble for my mom and me. I feel more comfortable coming to my mom now. I might ask my friends about things, but my mom's opinion is important now.

## Times Have Changed

The current cry for parental involvement comes along when most parents wish there were more than 24 hours in an average day. Hard economic realities and widespread acknowledgement that a woman doesn't need to be a full-time homemaker in order to be a good mother have caused changes in the structure of our families. In fact, the June and Ward Cleaver model of the typical American family is no longer the norm. Today only 7% of American children live in a two-parent home that has only one wage earner. Now nearly three-quarters of women who have school-age children work outside their homes, and 25% of all children who are under the age of 18 live in single-parent households.

Between holding down a job, keeping a household together, and running the family "taxi" service, most parents find themselves wondering where to come up with a relaxed half hour to spend a little quiet and personal time with one of their children. If you are one of these parents, you know that becoming involved in your child's education by volunteering an occasional afternoon in his classroom or by devoting an evening to a PTA meeting would take some pretty fancy juggling on your part. But that's not the kind of parent involvement we're discussing in this book: we want you to carve a small bit of time out of your day and use that time to read and converse with your child.

**TIP**

Set aside a little time every day to talk about things that are important to your child.

## Getting Started: Just Do It

Charlotte Smith, a mother who works as a financial manager, emphasizes how pressed for time most parents are when she says, "With both parents working outside the home and many times with single-parent families, you think you just can't take one more thing on." Charlotte goes on to say, "But family book sharing does not require a lot of extra time—you don't have to sit down and spend hours with this." Another mother who has been sharing and discussing books with her son for a year now says, "This doesn't take much time for a working parent. This wasn't work. We just had a good time."

Everyone is busy, yet we always find time to do what we think is important. The first thing parents can do is just get started; just do it. Don't let yourself get distracted by an extensive analysis of whether you have time. Try book sharing with your child. You may find that it has an energy all its own. You won't have to engage in a detailed analysis of your schedule. It may take care of itself. Just begin.

Parents who make time to share and talk about books with their children discover that reading for pleasure with their kids is a way of strengthening family relationships and getting to know their children better. Kevin McKay, a pharmacist, says that what he found most beneficial about family book sharing was being able to tune into and appreciate his daughter Summer's feelings. He said the program really brought them close in that way. By now, you have all kinds of motivation to act. Why not ask your child to select a book he or she wants to read, and then you read it too? As the television commercial used to say: "Try it. You'll like it."

## Set Aside Family Time

Every parent knows that family activities strengthen family bonds. What did your parents do to make you feel that you were an important part of the family? If you are like me, you treasure those memories that gave you a special sense of belonging. When you were a kid, what kinds of things did you and your mom or dad do together that influenced you? From my own childhood two types of family activities stand out in my memory—picnics and storytelling. Sunday was a family day for us. After church during the winter months, we often had a noon meal with relatives and then played games with cousins or aunts and uncles. During the summer months, we spent Sunday afternoons in the park eating picnic food and playing baseball or other active games.

Storytelling in our family began as an extension of homework. My mother would help us with our various homework activities by asking us questions, drilling us on math or spelling, or listening to us read. As a reward for getting our work done, she promised to read us a story while we had our bedtime cookies and milk. Yes, our bedtime routine really did include cookies and milk.

My father would arrive home from work at about the time story reading would occur (he worked in a grocery store and didn't get home until 8 p.m.). Instead of reading to us, he would tell us stories that came out of his youth in the mountains of Eastern Kentucky. Then he would say, "I'll tell you a story tonight, but you have to tell me one tomorrow." In that way he not only shared the fun of storytelling, he also got to hear about the events of our school days. We told him stories about the dramatic experiences we had at school and on our walks to and from the school building.

It is only natural for me to hope that my children will have fond memories of our family activities, but the significant point here is not the memories of specific stories or activities. It is the kind of time that we spent together. My mother and father set aside time to be with us children and to share their thoughts and feelings about childhood, about stories, and about life. In turn, we felt comfortable sharing our own joys and fears. Our success at school was not unrelated. By helping us nightly with our homework, my mother showed us an image of the discipline required to succeed in school, and she showed us that working together made it all a lot easier.

Before you read on, reflect for a moment about the personal time you spend with your own children. How much quality time do you set aside for them? What kinds of things do you and your son or daughter talk about? Is this time spent with your child a regular activity both of you can look forward to and depend on?

## Follow a Daily Schedule

Younger readers will get the most benefit from book sharing when it is a regular daily activity. Older children may be able to adapt to a more flexible schedule. The important thing is to have a plan. As Geri Bradford, a working mother with an elementary-school-age and a middle-school-age daughter points out, "To make it work, you really need to say, 'Okay, this is when we are going to do this'...Setting aside a definite time to read and talk together is the best way."

Finding time for family book sharing means both you and your child must make room in your schedules to spend a half hour or so a day of relaxed personal time with one another. You may want to invite your

child to take stock of his schedule with you. The following charts can help the two of you figure out what time might be best for you to read and talk about books together. After you and your child have a clear picture of how much time the two of you spend on various activities, you will be able to see where the two of you can set aside thirty minutes for reading and talking. Remember that changing routines often takes time. Don't get discouraged if you miss reading sessions now and then. You may even want to begin by reading once or twice a week and then work up to reading more often.

## *Carpe Diem*: Seize the Moment

Here are some strategies you and your child can use to develop a plan for book sharing.

- ***Decide what's important.*** After both of you have written your usual activities into the schedule, take stock of how each of you spends your time. Talk about your activities in order of importance. The two of you may even want to prioritize these activities by making a list that goes from most to least important. Setting up such a list with your child could require some diplomatic negotiation on your part. Your child may insist that all her television programs, even the reruns, are important, but with some careful persuasion, she will probably be willing to compromise.
- ***Be reasonable.*** Don't expect your child to sacrifice activities that are really important to him. It might be better in the long run to suggest that he reduce the time spent on certain activities rather than eliminate them completely. And we can't expect our children to make all the sacrifices. Let your child

know that you, too, are willing to give up or to rearrange some things that are important to you in order to develop a plan for family book sharing. Marge Simic made just such a trade-off in order to show her daughter, Whitney, how important it was that they make time to share books with one another. Marge's favorite time of the day is early morning when she enjoys a second cup of coffee and watches the *Today* show. When she and Whitney took a good look at their schedules and discovered that morning was the best time for them to read together, Marge got a chance to let her daughter know that she was willing to give up a favorite TV program in order to do family book sharing.

- ***Use television.*** We can't always say, "Turn off the television and pick up this book!" Television has its positive aspects. Watching and discussing quality TV programs as a family can be a way of working up to conversations about books. Watching historical mini-series, biographies, nature documentaries, and science programs with your children can open up interesting topics of conversation and can even promote reading. Watching a TV adaptation of a novel such as *Sarah, Plain and Tall* may interest children in reading the book or in reading similar books. If you have a VCR, you can make use of the connection between dramatized and written stories in a way that will interest the whole family. Even young children might be intrigued by the idea of watching a movie like *Hook,* and then reading J. M. Barrie's original *Peter Pan* to see how the movie compares with the book. And just think of the interesting conversations you could have over Peter Pan's refusal to grow up.

# Daily Activities

## Parent

| Time | Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thur | Fri | Sat |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Morning | | | | | | | |
| Afternoon | | | | | | | |
| Evening | | | | | | | |

# Daily Activities

## Child

| Time | Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thur | Fri | Sat |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Morning | | | | | | | |
| Afternoon | | | | | | | |
| Evening | | | | | | | |

- ***Start with short periods of reading.*** If your child is just getting used to reading for pleasure, you will probably want to begin with short periods (ten to twenty minutes) of time and then lengthen your sessions as your child's interest grows. The fact that you and your child are spending relaxed time together may increase her interest in reading. Set goals for your reading. Decide how many pages or chapters you will read in a day, and then work toward reading together regularly at least three or four times a week.

- ***Make your book-sharing time enjoyable and relaxing.*** As you read the beginning of this chapter, you spent a few moments taking stock of the kinds of things you do when you spend quality time with your child. You might take advantage of this opportunity to consider what you want to get and what you want your child to get out of the time she spends with you. In the best of all possible worlds, what would you want this time to be like?

Whatever else you decide you want to gain from this time, you will surely want this to be a relaxed and enjoyable part of your day. Make it an activity that both of you can count on and look forward to. Bedtime may be the best time for you, if you start early enough so that neither of you is too tired to enjoy it. Barbara Putrich explains why she and her daughter, Gayle, decided bedtime is the best time for them to share books:

> Our son goes to bed about an hour before Gayle. It became a routine for us. Gayle would take her shower and come down to the kitchen afterwards. Gayle has some medical problems so she needs

> to eat something at night...we would sit down in the kitchen and read and talk about the book while she had her snack and a big glass of water. We made sure we had at least 30-40 minutes to do this. It got to be something that we really looked forward to at the end of a long day—like taking a sigh at the end of the day. The kitchen may not sound like a real comfortable environment to read in but it worked for us...It was a quiet time and we even turned the lights low in the kitchen to make it feel more relaxed. We were able to work around everyone's busy schedule because it was fun for us. There have been many nights down in the kitchen that we didn't want to quit.

- ***Read wherever and whenever works best for you.*** You may suggest that your child schedule a break in his homework time to read with you. You can use the break to read something together that you will both enjoy. Or, like Treasure Sickels, you may discover that scheduling time to read in the morning, before your children go off to school, will motivate them to get up and pull themselves together a little earlier. Treasure Sickels says that she was typically yelling things like "Tie your shoes!" "Don't forget your lunch!" or "What do you mean you can't find your book bag?" at her children as they scrambled out the door to meet the bus. But scheduling time to read together in the morning at the breakfast table has changed her family's hectic morning routine. Because Treasure's children enjoy their time reading with her, they get up earlier so that they won't miss the story. Mornings are now less stressful for Treasure and her family.

- ***Be supportive.*** Once you have set up a routine, do what you can to protect it. Turn off the TV. Intercept phone calls, or even unplug the phone. Tell friends who knock at the door to come back later. You can run interference with friends and neighbors by posting a message on the door that says "We're reading. Please come back in thirty minutes." That should bring a smile to the faces of your own friends and a pop-eyed look of surprise to those of your kid's friends.

WE'RE READING!
COME BACK IN 30 MINUTES!

## Tomorrow Is Another Day

As you set up and try to follow a plan for family book sharing, you may find it necessary to take a break now and then. Don't feel like you have to abandon the program if you miss an occasional session. One mother expresses this idea when she says "Family book sharing is a little like dieting. If you miss, you can't beat yourself up. You just try again tomorrow."

Even though you may need to cut yourself some slack now and then, you and your child will benefit from being able to look forward to spending regular time together. As Jerry Nugent persuasively points out, making the time to do this may be difficult, but it's worth it. Jerry says,

> Here's how I look at it. I'm only going to have Nicholas until the summer after twelfth grade. After that time he will be off to school or wherever, and he is as good as gone from our home. Surely for this length of time I can give up something because after the summer of his twelfth grade, it's going to be all my time. Eighteen or nineteen years devoted to Nicholas isn't a lot of time out of my life, but it is a lot of valuable time in Nicholas' life.

## Bridges to Cross

The following chart illustrates how you can turn statements that set up barriers between you and your child into bridges that invite your son or daughter to read with you.

# Making Sure Reading Is a Pleasure at Home

| NEGATIVE | | POSITIVE |
|---|---|---|
| "Turn the TV off and let's read." | VS. | "This book I picked up looks interesting. When your TV program is over, how about seeing if it's a book we might enjoy reading together?" |
| "Your teacher said we need to read at home so your grades will improve. Sit down here and let's read." | VS. | "I'd like to do more reading for fun at home." |
| "I'm going to unplug the TV, and everybody is going to read from now on during free time at home." | VS. | "I'd like to spend time together at home. Why don't we work out a schedule for TV watching and other activities? We can set aside time to read together. What would be some good times for you?" |

# Making Sure Reading Is a Pleasure at Home (*cont.*)

| NEGATIVE | | POSITIVE |
|---|---|---|
| "You are going to have to give up your activities in order to get this reading done." | VS. | "We spend a lot of time in the car. Why don't we remember to bring along a book we both enjoy? You can do some reading while I drive. Others in the car might be interested, too." |
| "Here is a book that your teacher said all kids like to read. You are going to read to me. Let's get started." | VS. | "Keep an eye out for books we might enjoy reading together. There seem to be a lot of interesting new books out. I'd really enjoy reading some of them with you." |
| "We're only going to read books on these lists or books that your teacher recommends." | VS. | "Magazines and comic books might be fun to read for a change. We can read a variety of things...whatever seems interesting." |

# CHAPTER 3
# Motivating Your Child

> I didn't realize the enjoyment [my daughter] Julie and I had missed before this program. We laughed and cried at the books we read. We shared our thoughts and feelings on many "touchy issues."
>
> —*Cathy Buck*

The stories I have been telling you indicate that other parents and children have found family book sharing worthwhile. You may, by this point, have taken time to assess your schedule, and you may even have managed to make room for family book sharing in your daily routine. Now that you have laid all the groundwork, the big question is, "What can you do to help your child realize that sharing and discussing books with you is something he will enjoy?" That's the problem we will tackle in this chapter.

## Look for a Model

We have already talked about how children tend to follow the examples set by their parents. But let me

say again that the two most influential things you can do to persuade your child to read and talk about books with you are to let him see you reading, and to create a home environment rich with interesting reading materials—even if you need to regularly borrow hefty stacks of books from the public library to create this impression. There is reliable evidence that even in the most depressed economic conditions, whether a child becomes a reader depends to a large extent on his contact with a role model in his family who is a reader. Such a role model can be anyone (a mom, or dad, or grandma, or uncle) who reads and talks about books with a kid. Did anyone in your own family serve as a reading model for you when you were a child? How did your family influence the way you feel about books and reading? An adult who is an active reader can give something very precious to the children who look up to her—she can set an example that inspires them to get firsthand experience of the rewards reading can give.

An active reader does more than read a lot of books and magazines. An active reader shows her involvement with a book by her comments and by her actions. If an idea intrigues her, she asks other people to think through the issue with her. If she reads something amusing, she laughs or shares the joke with her family. An active reader does not simply hide behind a book; she shows her family and friends that the ideas she reads about stir her blood and help her connect with other people.

**TIP**

Active readers become *involved* in books. Encourage children to ask questions and to look for more information about subjects of interest.

These images of an active reader tell young people that books and the ideas contained in them are worth paying attention to. That's especially true if the active reader is a parent or some other grown-up who is especially important to the child. But the child's model may also be someone outside your family. Perhaps this person could be a model to both you and your child. Your model may be a common acquaintance or a television personality who discusses books and magazine articles and tells how they affect him.

You can build an atmosphere that makes books a natural part of your child's life. Think about the books and magazines that were in your home when you were a child. What message did your home environment send about the value and uses of reading? You can create an environment that sends positive messages by

- getting your child a library card as soon as she can scribble her "name" on a piece of paper and by making frequent visits to the library. Even a toddler will enjoy having a library card of her very own.
- encouraging family members to give your child books as holiday and birthday presents or to subscribe to age-appropriate magazines in your child's name. The children's librarian at your local library can give you information about which magazines your child will enjoy most.
- making a special place in your child's room for her to keep her own or borrowed books, comics, and magazines. You can build a sturdy bookshelf out of a couple of boards and a few bricks.
- regularly reading aloud to and with your child.
- talking with your child about books and the ideas they contain or suggest.

## Bedtime Stories Aren't Just for Babies

Moms and dads often treasure memories of the quiet moments before bedtime that they spent reading picture books and fairy tales to their young children. My two youngest daughters wanted bedtime stories until they were ten and twelve years old. They often laugh at their memories of my falling asleep while reading to them. One time when they especially wanted me to finish the tale, they poured water on my head to wake me up. Our nighttime reading and story-telling time became such an important ritual for all of us that I sometimes recorded stories for my kids to listen to on those evenings when I could not be at home when bedtime rolled around.

By sharing picture books with their toddlers at bedtime, parents lay the groundwork for those children to become recreational readers when they grow older. Even toddlers can experience the excitement of identifying with characters who are having adventures they themselves would like to have; even young children enjoy the thrill of building their own fantasy or adventure in response to a story they have heard. We parents generally teach and show our children that reading is fun when they are babies.

## Keep on Reading to Your Child

When children grow older, we tend to think it is no longer necessary to read to (or with) them. Ro Pape, a teacher and the mother of an eighth grader who was a reluctant reader, found that reading aloud to her son was the only way she could get him interested in practicing his reading. Ro told us that her son Tony was more than a reluctant reader—she said he was downright resistant to anything having to do with books and reading. Ro kept waiting for her son to naturally develop into a good reader, but it just didn't happen. By the time Tony reached eighth grade, Ro decided she needed to do something; that's when she started doing family book sharing with her son.

Since Tony was not enthusiastic about the idea, beginning to share books with him took a little insistence on Ro's part: she had to persuade him to read aloud with her. After Ro had read one book with her son, he was still not eager to continue. Then someone in their book-sharing group lent Ro and Tony a copy of *The Land I Lost.* Ro told us that everyone in her book club had been enjoying and passing around this book which was written by Huynh Quang Nhuong about his childhood in Vietnam. Ro's decision to take her friends' recommendations and try this book with her son was the key that opened up Tony's interest in reading for pleasure.

Whereas his mother had previously had to cajole him into listening to her read for a half hour each evening, when they read this book Tony didn't want their sessions to end. He would urge her to read another, and then yet another, section of the book. Because this experience really turned around her son's ideas about reading (he began then to read for plea-

sure on his own and his work at school also began to improve), Ro found herself wondering where we ever got the idea that we should stop reading to our kids once they start learning how to read on their own. As another mother, Geri Bradford, says, "Family book sharing is a real positive way of continuing to share books with your children as they grow older." Most parents discover that subtle nudges are enough to pique their children's interest in sharing books. Others, like Ro, find that both insistence and persistence are called for. Sometimes these measures are part of motivating kids.

**TIP**

By continuing to read to children, no matter what their ages, you can often motivate even the most reluctant readers.

## Tickle the Imagination

Ro and Tony's experience points out how choosing the right book can really boost children's interest in family book sharing. Finding an idea or an image that tickles the imagination is often the spark that ignites our interest in reading a book. Generally, you and your child will want to choose books that reflect her experience and particular interests. For instance, if your daughter is trying to figure out what kinds of things girls can and cannot do, you might suggest reading a book like *There's a Girl in My Hammerlock.* In this story a young teenager named Maisie Potter decides she wants to be a cheerleader. But when Maisie doesn't make the squad, she patiently waits for the next season's sports to begin and tries out for wrestling.

Even though she is the first and only girl ever to make the team, she surprises everyone with her skill and endurance. Such a book might stimulate some very interesting conversations between you and your child.

Younger children who have just gotten a new baby brother or sister might be interested in learning about where babies come from by reading a book like *Boys Are Boys and Girls Are Girls* with their parents. Likewise, children who are adjusting to a divorce might enjoy a picture book called *Charlie Anderson.* This picture book introduces us to two sisters who have two different homes—one with their mother and one with their father and step-mom. Little do they know that their cat, whom they call Charlie, also has another home where he is called Anderson. When the little girls (whose bed Charlie sleeps on at night) and the young couple (whose house he lounges in during the day) get together, the cat becomes Charlie Anderson.

## Find Stories Your Kids Can Relate To

Kids say they like reading books about other kids their own age. They like stories that speak to problems and feelings they are experiencing. Ellen, the mother of a middle-school student, describes how she has used book sharing as a way of working out the inevitable problems that have arisen from her daughter's natural need to assert her independence:

> I see this stage now where she is more independent and growing away from us. There's times when she is more aloof, but it's funny. She still wants us to read with her. She and I read *When Parents Drive You Crazy.* I really enjoyed this. We talked about people's interactions and how we think.

Leslie, another middle-school student, says that as soon as she "started showing signs of puberty," her mother went to the library and got a couple of books on the subject for the two of them to share and discuss.

If your talking and reading sessions with your child are to be successful, the books you choose to share must be ones he will enjoy—ones that reflect his current interests or help him understand his recent experiences. When your child discovers that book sharing can be fun, he will be more motivated to take part in it. But until he makes this discovery—until he encounters a book that really catches his interest—you will probably have to encourage him with some firm and gentle persuasion. You can help your child link reading with pleasure by saying "Let's read a few pages and see if we enjoy this one."

Take a moment to consider what kinds of ideas might tickle your child's imagination. Make a list of topics that deal with his favorite pastimes or that speak to his recent experiences. You may even want to check this list out with your child to see if you have put together an accurate assessment of his concerns and current passions.

**TIP**

Take a positive, enquiring approach: "Let's try this and see if we like it." Sooner or later, a story will catch your child's imagination.

## Create Cliffhangers

One surefire way to motivate your child to read with you is to exploit her natural curiosity. Think of the excitement you feel when you get so caught up in a story that you just can't bring yourself to put the book down until you find out how the plot works itself out. Even in conversation, we are always interested in knowing how a story ends or in knowing what so-and-so said or did next. Writers of fiction who know how to exploit our curiosity deliberately lead their readers to the edges of their chairs with anticipation. The daily "soaps" constantly remind us of this technique as they bounce from one mini-story to the next, always ending the scene in a way that leaves us wondering what will happen next: "Will so and so break up? Will they get married? Will he find her before she marries the wrong guy? Will she get revenge on the witch who has ruined her life?"

You can use this natural human curiosity to motivate your child to read with you by playing up—or maybe even creating—cliff-hangers in the stories you read together. This can be an especially effective strategy to use with reluctant readers. Linda Lee says she tried using the cliff-hanger technique with her daughter, Jennifer:

> It was hard for her to get excited about a book. Family book sharing helped me see how I could help her. Our reading usually starts out with me starting the book by reading the first couple of chapters. By the end of the year, we were reading parallel. I would read a chapter and tell her a little bit about it, and then

> this would encourage her to read further on her own. I'd encourage her by saying things like "Jennifer, wait till you get to Chapter 30. You're not going to believe what happened." She'd say "Tell me what happened." Then I'd say "You've got to read it!" This kind of encouragement would get her going and keep her interested in what we were reading...The best thing about being involved in family book sharing is that she is finally reading by herself.

You can "create" cliff-hangers in the stories you read with your child by inviting him to predict the next event. What does he think will happen next, or how does he think his favorite character will solve a particularly thorny problem? Having ventured a guess, your child will probably want to read on to see if he is right. Make a game out of predicting events—this can be especially challenging if you and your child disagree about what a certain character is likely to do. By playing such a game, you are not only motivating your child to read, you are actually helping him improve his reading and thinking skills. Predicting events automatically shifts the reader into a higher gear and makes him think more critically.

**TIP**

Hold your child's interest by asking him to predict what will happen next.

## Use Competition

Tapping into your child's competitive instinct is another natural motivator. Some kids love the challenge of a contest. Who can finish first? Who can figure out the answer first? Becky Jester, a fifth-grader, says that even though she and her mother start reading a book at the same time, she knows that she will finish before her mother does. Ms. Jester explains.

> This is a situation where Becky comes to me and says, "Have you done your reading?" or "Aren't you finished with that yet?" She's always asking me, "Where are you in the book? You'll love this next part!" She will come home from school and share something from a book that she is reading in class. Becky will say, "Oh Mom, you've got to read this! It's really good!" It's been fun to be included in excitement like this.

## Change Places

You may find yourself surprised by the extent of your child's knowledge of a subject about which you know very little. Exploit your ignorance. It can give your child real motivation to share and talk with you. Books that deal with subjects your child is interested in, but about which you are fairly uneducated, can give the two of you a refreshing chance to switch places. Your child will probably appreciate the chance to be your teacher for a change, especially if you show genuine interest in and respect for his knowledge.

Choosing books that allow your child to be the more knowledgeable partner in conversation with you is a great idea because it really can open new lines of communication. It shows that you do want to talk and learn. And it lets your child know that you are not using reading as a club to beat him into learning something. As one father noted, "sharing and exchanging information enlightens both of us."

Knowing that this is a time when you will give her your full attention and really listen to and talk with her can also motivate your child to make time to share books with you. As a wise man once said, "When we are listened to, it creates us—we bloom in the presence of those people who give us their attention." So much of our interaction with our children takes the form of our tossing out practical reminders, trying to plan schedules, or offering direct "requests", that most children will look forward to having a regular block of time they can use to discuss what they think and feel with us. Leslie, a fifth grader who shares books with her mom, says,

> I enjoy reading aloud with my mom now. When I don't understand parts of the book, she is right there to help me understand it better. She gives me lots of answers, she listens to my opinion, and I listen to her opinion. Sometimes we don't agree, but at least we hear both sides now.

**TIP**

Let children take the lead and become "experts" about subjects that interest them.

## Create Opportunities

If all else fails, you can always resort to bargaining. Alanagh Pimlott, a working mother who has three sons, has found that offering one of her sons the option to extend his reading time by reading in bed actually motivates him to read more. Alanagh explains:

> Last year he had to go to bed at 9:00. This year he is going to bed at 9:30. If he is reading in bed, he can stay up until 10:00. But he has to be in bed by 9:30. But staying up to watch TV is not an option. Doing something else is not an option. He can stay up until 10:00 if he is reading in bed.

The following suggestions may help you create windows of opportunity for reading and sharing:

- ***Limit your child's TV time.*** The debate about whether TV inhibits children's intellectual and emotional development continues. One thing is

certain, however: children who spend all or most of their free hours in front of the TV do not read much. You can help by limiting your child's TV time and by watching and discussing her favorite TV programs with her.

A national commission suggests that 10 hours a week of TV viewing is a healthy average for most children. You can make the imposition of such a limit less difficult for your child by helping her decide which programs she really doesn't want to miss. You might even find it helpful to get out the *TV Guide* and make a list of the programs your child wants to see in a given week. Or you could keep a TV log on top of the set so that your child can record what programs she watches and keep track of how much time she spends sitting in front of the tube.

Talking with children about the programs they watch is one way parents can counteract the famous "mind rotting" effect endless hours of passive TV viewing can have on kids. Discuss programs in terms of plot and character, much as you would discuss books with your child. If you talk about stories you and your child see dramatized on TV, you will probably discover that you really can use TV to create a window of opportunity for conversation and sharing.

- ***Avoid reprimanding your child for watching TV.*** Limit TV time and make fun books available for your children, but avoid playing reading off against TV. Criticizing your child for watching the tube instead of reading a book will make him feel that reading for fun is a duty, like eating his spinach and carrots.

- ***Reward your child's efforts with sincere praise.*** All children want to please their parents and nothing encourages them to try harder than receiving praise and acknowledgment for their efforts. When your child shares ideas and books with you, let her know how much you appreciate it.

## Solve a Problem

As children grow up, they face many questions and decisions. Sometimes you know exactly what is bothering your child; sometimes you can only guess. In the pre-teen years, for example, almost everyone struggles with questions about sexuality and relationships.

Peer pressure often worries children because they want to be accepted by their age-mates. Or your child may be worried about specific problems concerned with school success or with growing up. Though your child may not start up a conversation with you about his problems, he may be willing to talk about similar problems and situations when they show up in a book.

The range of children's books available today covers almost every childhood question. During the '80s, Judy Blume was the most popular children's author on the shelf. Her books are about kid's problems: moving to a new school, being overweight, feeling like a nothing, exploring awakening sexuality. Many other authors also target kid's problems—divorcing parents, homelessness, drugs, alcohol—as part of their stories. These books are popular with young people because they reflect the fears and the problems in their own lives.

That is not to say that parents and children should only read and discuss "problem books." You should feel

free to use the entire range of children's literature. The point here, however, is to remind you that your child may want to read stories that involve the hurts and fears that roll around in her own mind. Reading about a similar event in a book gives her and you a chance to talk about these important feelings without having to make an explicit association with her own doubts or problems.

As you read and talk together, you and your child will also trade jokes, stories about your interests, the future, the past, what events and characters strike your fancy, and so on. Your shared book will give you a point of departure. It will give you something outside yourselves to talk about.

## Bridges to Cross

As my grandmother used to say, "You will catch more flies with honey than you will with vinegar." You may recognize some of your own statements and phrases in the negative scripts presented here. When you recognize your own words on the "vinegar" side of this section, spend a few moments thinking about how you can revise them into sweeter invitations.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "What, got your nose in a book again?" | VS. | "What is it that you like about those science-fiction stories?" |

Asking questions that test your child will not be very effective in getting her to open up and share her real responses to a story. Try asking questions that invite her to draw some conclusions and make up her own mind about situations.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "What gifts did Sarah bring with her when she travelled to the farm?" | VS. | "Why do you suppose Sarah brought gifts for the children?" |

Nagging your child to share books with you will only make him feel like you have assigned him another chore. "I" statements like the one below will let your child know that you are really interested in reading and sharing with him. Your enthusiasm might turn out to be contagious.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "Read! You know you need to. Your teacher said so!" | VS. | "You may not think this is a very exciting idea, but I want us to try it and see if we enjoy it." |

Avoid trivializing your child's reading interests, even if they seem trivial to you. Expressing respect for her current consuming passion will do more to encourage your child's desire to read than buying her a whole shelf of *Harvard Classics* is likely to.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "Good readers usually read more than comic books and Nintendo magazines." | VS. | "I think you are getting to be quite an expert on Nintendo games. If you were going to write an article for one of those magazines, what would you write about?" |

Statements that belittle a child's interests will let him know this book-sharing business is more for his parent than for him. Inviting him to share his knowledge of a sport or activity that intrigues him will have just the opposite effect.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "You are interested in wrestling, but I don't know anything about it." Let's get a book I know something about." | VS. | "If we choose this book, I'm going to need help understanding some of the vocabulary and the situations. Will you help me?" |

**TIP**

Unintentional ridicule can squelch a child's interest in reading. Invite your child to talk about everything she reads—even escapist fiction.

# CHAPTER 4
# Selecting Books

> I was very surprised that my mom would want to read books that I like to read. But I was even more surprised that she actually enjoyed them.
>
> —Gayle Putrich,
> a seventh grader

## What Makes a Book Interesting?

Do you remember what your two or three favorite books were when you were a child? Do you remember what attracted you to those books? The book that I remember most from my early childhood is *Peter Rabbit.* My mother read that book to me, probably before I could read print, and Peter's story became one that I read again and again after I had learned to read for myself. There was an impending danger in the story. As soon as Peter decided not to obey his mother's warning about going into Mr. McGregor's garden, I knew something terrible was going to happen to him. It was worth reading that story again and again to relive Peter's attempt to escape Mr. McGregor and to avoid ending up as rabbit stew.

Then, when he did escape, I felt the warm relief and the comfort of the cup of tea his mother gave him as she put him to bed early.

Peter's disobedience, the suspense of the chase by Mr. McGregor, the punishment of catching a cold, and the reassurance of mother's cup of tea all made *Peter Rabbit* the perfect children's book for me. It provided an adventure and also fit my moral view—kids who disobeyed their parents would end up in the stew.

My choice of books, like my choice of friends, naturally changed across my growing years. My early friends were close neighbors, and my early books were those that were handy, especially the *Golden Books* because they were also inexpensive. As my desire for adventure moved closer to the real world, I read the *Hardy Boys* books, which I borrowed from the library and got as gifts. My search for adventure led me through several series of books about pioneer heroes, and that quest brought me to James Fenimore Cooper's classic tale, *The Last of the Mohicans.*

In high school, my interests had shifted to realism, to using books to mirror my own search for an adult identity. The book I remember most from my teenage reading is *Studs Lonigan* by James Farrell. Studs was a teenager growing up in a tough, working class neighborhood in Chicago. His struggles for a place in the real world helped me see that I was normal, that looking beyond the limits of my working-class neighborhood was not crazy, that my sexual desires were not different from those of a lot of other teens, that my confusion over social justice issues was reflected in the outbursts of this fictional character, Studs Lonigan.

## Match Your Interest

Throughout my elementary and secondary school years, my relatives gave me books as gifts, starting with the popular children's books of the day. As my own interests became clear, parents and relatives gave me books to match. And that's the first secret of book selection—find one that matches your interest.

Maybe you, too, had different favorites for different phases of your life because your needs and your reading tastes changed as you grew older. J. R. Kennett, a middle-schooler who takes pride in the fact that he now enjoys reading "big, 700-page novels," describes the changes in his reading tastes by saying, "I mostly like reading science fiction books. I've been into science fiction around three years. Before that I was into mysteries."

As you reminisce about the books you enjoyed as a child, think about what it would have been like for you to have discovered and read these books with one of your parents. Picture yourself sitting next to your mom or dad (or your grandmother or grandfather) and imagine the conversations that could have taken place about this book. What would you have said to that important adult about how the book riled up your emotions or described adventures you wanted to experience? How do you suppose those conversations would have changed your relationship with your mom or dad? How do you think that kind of sharing would have affected your attitude toward books and reading? You might want to keep those questions in mind as we think about ways of selecting books you and your child will enjoy.

## Give Time and Attention

As parents, most of us say that we want our children to "have it better than we did." When my parents (who married and started a family during the Great Depression) said this, they meant they wanted to give us material advantages they didn't have. We all want to give our children the best of everything, but sometimes we get so caught up in trying to pay for nice things that we forget that the most valuable gifts we as parents have to give our children cost us time and attention, not a lot of money.

By turning your child on to the pleasure of recreational reading and by actively sharing that pleasure with him, you will be giving him a gift that will accompany him for the rest of his life. You will also be forming a bond between you. But in order for your child to get these benefits, you need to find books that catch and sustain his interest. In this chapter, you will pick up strategies that will help you

- make reading fun for your child.
- help your child develop good book selection skills.
- teach your child how to use the recreational reading "acid test."

**TIP**

Choose some books that interested you when you were younger. They will probably interest your child as well.

## Make Reading Fun

The first rule of recreational reading is a simple one: reading for pleasure must be pleasurable. Family book sharing isn't going to be fun for your child (and it's going to be a constant struggle for you) if your child thinks the books you choose to read together are boring. Especially if she is a reluctant reader, your child may have some initial resistance to the idea of reading and sharing books with you, but that resistance generally evaporates once a child comes across a book or two that "hooks" her. At first your child may not realize that there are different kinds of reading. Julie Buck says that when her mother wanted to start reading books with her, she "thought it would be just like doing schoolwork." Julie's mother explains:

> Julie is seeing that these books can be interesting and that they tell a story that she can enjoy. You don't get this kind of excitement in a textbook, and kids need this nudge or opportunity to understand that there are different kinds of reading. I didn't expect miracles to happen by doing this program, but I think that it has opened a door to reading that has been closed for Julie.

Your child will probably be most interested in books that reflect his experience of himself or address his curiosity about the world in which he lives. In the final analysis, your child is the best judge of what he will find interesting. For that reason, you may want to encourage your son or daughter to choose the first couple of books you read together. While he will surely benefit from your guidance, he will probably be more

enthusiastic about sharing books with you if he makes the first couple of important decisions about what books to read.

After you have shared two or three books of your child's choosing, you may want to work out a plan that allows each of you to have a turn at choosing the books you will read together. Jerry Nugent says he and his son Nicholas have worked out a strategy that allows them both to explore their reading interests:

> We've read some books that I had a hard time getting interested in, but because one of us was interested in it, both of us were. There was one book, *Anne of Green Gables,* that Nicholas enjoyed; personally it was a difficult book for me to get through...but we did it. We talked about that up front. Once we start a book, we are going to finish it. We do have different interests at times, but we were able to balance those differences. Nicholas would pick one book and when it was finished, it was my turn to pick the next book.

## Guide without Dominating

You may have to work through your own attitudes about recreational reading in order to help (or even to allow) your child to choose reading material he will find really exciting. Maybe you believe that when you read, you should be doing so to improve your mind or elevate your soul. Maybe you feel that fiction books or books that don't qualify as serious literature are really a waste of time. To the contrary, many studies support the idea that recreational reading

- sharpens children's reading skills,
- advances their critical thinking abilities,
- expands their vocabularies,
- enhances their ability to communicate with others,
- and even improves their math skills.

Reading for fun can make your child a better student. And he doesn't have to read the classics in order to improve his mind. In fact, he will probably become a more motivated and skillful reader if you let him follow his own interests instead of imposing your ideas about what you think would be appropriate reading choices. Learn to discuss recreational reading the way you discuss sports, vacations, or any topic for which you have a mutual enthusiasm and about which both of you generally make statements, ask questions, and perhaps argue a bit.

Sue Miller, who teaches eighth grade and has started a family book-sharing club with her students and their parents, says she has noticed that it is often difficult for parents to let their children take the lead in selecting the books they will read together. Sue acknowledges that

many of us tend to push our own ideas about what makes for worthwhile reading on our children:

> I'm watching parents pick out books and I'm hearing a lot of "Oh, this is a great classic. My child should be reading this." They are picking up books like *Johnny Tremain* because they [the parents] are interested in reading it. I'm having a hard time not saying, "You should be choosing for your child's interests." When we talk about choosing books, I stress that parents should be choosing high-interest, exciting books to get the child started. This is the only way these kids will enjoy this experience... I am very concerned that parents are telling their kids, "Here, this is the book we are going to read." Parents need to understand that, in order to get this family reading going at home, the child should be choosing the books they read together... That might mean parents have to read something that isn't a classic or that they don't necessarily enjoy. But if it gets the child reading and interested in sharing, then it's the right book for this particular time.

## Choosing the Right Books

Most parents who have done family book sharing with their kids say that they are not only reading more, but they are actually enjoying most of the books they and their children choose to read. You will, however, probably discover that you and your child have different reading interests and you will have to negoti-

ate ways to balance her interests with your own. But your greatest satisfaction in family book sharing will probably come from spending time with and getting to know your child better, rather than from immersing yourself in books that fascinate you.

In the description of parents choosing books for their children I've just quoted, Sue Miller talks about how important it is for parents to let children choose the "right" book. You may be one of those parents who discovers that the right book for this particular time isn't a book at all. The right kind of reading for this particular moment may turn out to be

- a magazine about one of his special interests.
- a comic book series.
- the sports page of the local newspaper.
- an ongoing comic strip.
- any other kind of reading material that sparks your child's interest.

Kids know what will get them interested in reading. J. R. Kinnett, a middle-school student whose mom and dad have managed to make reading books and talking about them a real family affair by getting their two younger kids involved as well, has some good advice for parents who want to share books with their children. J.R. says,

> You can't force anybody to read, and I just don't think it's right to force someone to read something they don't like. You'll never get them to like reading then! You've got to try to find out what they are interested in—sports, hobbies, TV pro-

grams, or whatever you can think of to find out what they like. Then you try to find a book to fit their interests. And having someone to do it with helps.

**TIP**

Recreational reading can improve reading skills and expand vocabularies. Discuss this kind of reading just as you would discuss sports or any other topic of mutual interest.

## Inventory Interests

Taking an inventory of your son's or daughter's current passions and then filling out a similar inventory of your own is one way you can guide without dominating when it comes time to choose reading material together.

Making a list of your likes and dislikes will also enable you and your child to set some limits about what each of you is and is not willing to read. One mother notes that she draws the line at sharing certain of her daughter's reading interests. This mother, Barbara Putrich, says that her daughter is into Stephen King, whom Barbara "absolutely refuses to read." Even though their age difference means that Barbara and her daughter have different reading interests, Barbara says she knows that her daughter has "gotten a real kick" out of the idea that they can still find some common ground on which to choose books that they will both enjoy reading together.

# Taking Inventory

1. What do you like to do most?

   _____

2. What is your favorite thing to do with your family?

   _____

3. What are your favorite animals?

   _____

4. What things do you like to collect?

   _____

5. What are your currently favorite

   books? _____
   magazines? _____
   comic books? _____
   newspapers? _____
   comic strips? _____

6. What kinds of books do you like most?

   - ❑ fairy tales
   - ❑ adventure
   - ❑ jokes/riddles
   - ❑ poetry
   - ❑ how-to books
   - ❑ romances
   - ❑ picture books
   - ❑ science fiction
   - ❑ autobiography and biography
   - ❑ detective stories
   - ❑ sports novels
   - ❑ books about growing up

7. Who's your favorite character to read about?

   _____

8. What do you like about that character?

   _____

9. What TV shows or movies do you enjoy watching?

   _____

10. What are those shows about?

    _____

## The Right Choice Makes All the Difference

If you enjoy reading and if you read a lot, you probably use some tried-and-true techniques to select books you are pretty sure you will like. But our children haven't yet developed reliable book selection skills. Because they may not be able to do a good job of predicting which books will meet their expectations and reflect their interests, they need lots of gentle guidance from interested adults. Such guidance is important because children who are unable to find books that absorb them often quit reading.

Both parents and children need to agree that it is okay to quit a book that is not interesting. Everyone loves a good story, but if we don't think the story before us is a good one, or if we don't like the way the author is telling it, then we won't be motivated to read. When children are unable to select enjoyable books on their own and when they don't get the kind of guidance that will help them make good choices, those children are unlikely to develop into mature independent readers.

### If They Don't Pass the Acid Test, "Ditch 'Em"

Jerry Nugent and his son Nicholas say they made an agreement to finish every book that they started, even if one of them found the book uninteresting. That plan works for them, but unless your child has already developed pretty reliable book-selection strategies, you may want take the "acid-test" approach to choosing the books you will read together. Leslie Bradford, a middle-school student who is also an avid reader, describes how the acid test works:

> The reading teacher said that if you read twenty pages of the book and you still do not enjoy the book, then that is not the right book for you. It may be the right book for somebody else, but maybe it's not right for you.

Becky Jester and her mother think that the acid-test approach is the best one:

> **Becky:** Mom brought a book home one time that we really didn't like. It was called *The Bear's House*. I told Mom about Mrs. Bova's [Becky's teacher's] suggestion for books like this. She told us just to "ditch 'em."
>
> **Mrs. Jester:** I like that philosophy. I think when I was growing up, we didn't have an opportunity to pick books that we wanted to read in class. Our classroom reading was required and we had to finish the book regardless of whether we liked it or not. I can appreciate Becky's choice to "ditch" it. It was a good book, but it would have been better for Sarah, my ten-year-old.

When you and your child choose a book, agree to give it the twenty-page test. (You may need to lower the page number to five or ten or fifteen pages, depending on your child's reading level.) If the book doesn't pass the test, "ditch" it and choose another one. Trying to make your way through a boring book just for the sake of finishing what you've started can have an adverse effect on family book sharing.

You can create your own personal list of award winners by keeping a list of the books that pass your acid test. Such a list will come in handy when you or your child want to recommend a "good read" to someone else. Reading over your list of personal award winners will give you and your child a real feeling of accomplishment once you're three or four books into family book sharing. Your son or daughter might even have a good time writing short reviews of the books on your list. Aside from its practical value for helping others make good book choices, such a list could turn out to be a valuable keepsake of your child's growing-up years.

# Developmental Interests and Books

| Characteristics | Interests | Skills |
|---|---|---|
| **AGES 3–5** | | |
| Accepts what is in books and on TV as real. | Enjoys magic and fantasy characters; likes using language and word play. | Reads pictures to help tell stories; easily memorizes rhymes and predictable phrases. |
| **AGES 6–7** | | |
| Beginning to sort out fantasy and reality. | Enjoys stories about people and situations that he/she can relate to. | Able to figure out the "code" so that print carries meaning; memorizes patterns and relies heavily on previous experience with a book. |
| **AGES 8–9** | | |
| Understands the difference between fantasy and reality. | Interested in facts and information about "real" people and events. | Knows how to read, but lacks the stamina needed for novels; needs the support of pictures, clearly printed text, and familiar vocabulary. |
| **AGES 10–11** | | |
| Understands "time" and incidents in terms of "then" and "now." | Enjoys learning about real people and events that took place "a long time ago." | Able to sequence events and mentally organize information so that it makes sense; able to project self into real time and places. |
| **AGES 12–14** | | |
| Relationships are important; developing principles by which to judge others. | Enjoys characters that share same problems, concerns, and feelings. | Able to "feel" and empathize with others who are "going through the same things." Reading takes on a deeper meaning. |

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## Changing Tastes Over the Years

Noticing how your children's interests in print and books change as they mature and acquire skill in reading can enable you to observe milestones in your children's development as readers. Personal experience seems to play as strong a role as academic progress in the development of children's reading tastes.

In the early years (ages three to five), children love fantasy and fairy tales more than they enjoy reading about how soccer is played. At this age they enjoy using language and delight in chanting predictable phrases and rhymes such as "Run, run, as fast as you can. You can't catch me. I'm the Gingerbread Man."

No one ever gives up the pleasure of fantasy, but as six- and seven-year-olds begin to sort out the differences between fantasy and reality, they more clearly understand the importance of their family and of significant people and events in their lives. Thus books about sleeping outside, pets, and friends are interesting to kids of this age, especially if the books are written so that kids can read them by themselves. With their entry into the world of eight- and nine-year-olds, your children will become increasingly interested in using books as a source of information about real people and events.

By the time children reach the age of ten or eleven, they have developed a better understanding of historical time and are able to project themselves into times and places they know were real. They enjoy learning about people who lived in other time periods and under social and governmental conditions different from their own. That's the reason that biographies and historical fiction are popular with these kids.

Some time between twelve and fourteen, most children tumble and scream their way into puberty. Hormones drive most of their interest in romance novels, of course, but their critical thinking skills also take a major leap forward and enable them to develop principles for judging people and situations. Kids of this age want to read novels about realistic problems common to their peers. Hence Judy Blume's books about feeling unattractive, not being accepted by peers, and similar pre-teen and teen problems are the rage of this age group.

As the vastness of the adult world begins to open up to children in the twelve-to-fourteen age group, these kids undergo a transition in their reading preferences. Beyond romance and pimples, they see a much more complex world and begin to wonder if they can survive in it. What if they had been with Anne Frank hiding from the Nazis? Would they be able to survive a plane crash and stay alive in the wilderness as the boy in the novel *Hatchet* does?

No clear-cut boundaries mark one stage of reading development from another. Your child may have quite different reading interests and abilities from the ones briefly sketched out here. These descriptions only give you some general ideas about where to start and what to expect when you and your child begin to share books. Start with his interest and then remind him that he has to give you equal time later to discuss one of yours. This will enable both of you to gain valuable information and to get a loving peek at the heart of the other person.

# Putting It All Together

Throughout this book we have shown you how to use books to open up communication with your child. We have also talked about finding time to read and about motivating your child. Finally, we have shown how to determine your child's interests and to select books that will match those interests.

Now we will bring together some of the most important points you will want to keep in mind as you read to and with your child. In the early stages, you will probably refer to the following guidelines fairly often as reminders of ways to keep the experience positive and rewarding. As you go along and as your child matures, you will find yourself doing all these things as a matter of course.

## Guidelines for Reading Aloud with Children of All Ages

You have seen how worthwhile it is to read to your child, no matter what age. Here are some things to keep in mind.

- ***Encourage your child to participate actively when you read aloud.*** Reading aloud creates an atmosphere much like a conversation. If you watch good readers, you will notice that they often make eye contact with their listeners and often stop to ask questions like "What do you think about that?" or "What do you think will happen next?" Though the primary purpose of reading aloud is to communicate an interesting story, a comment or a question directed to young listeners establishes a give-and-take interaction.

- ***Make it a family affair.*** Even though your family may contain readers of several different ages and abilities, that doesn't mean that you can't enjoy sharing the same book. Bebe Kinnett explains how she and her sons and husband share a book:

> It's been a great family affair for us! Jim [husband] does most of the reading and the four of us sit around together and listen to the story. We've got two green rocking chairs that Jim and I sit in. J.R. is usually on the

> couch, and the two little brothers wrap up in a blanket on the floor. It feels like the old days around the radio or something. Then it got to the point where Neil [the five-year-old] would fall asleep every night while we were reading the book, so we started reading upstairs. We didn't have to carry Neil so far.

J.R., the Kinnetts' oldest son, elaborates on his mother's statements by saying,

> I mean, when you think about the age difference in our family, there is almost ten years' difference between my little brother and me. So it's kind of like our interests range from *Little Red Riding Hood* to big 700-page novels. So I think that if we can do it, anybody can do it as a family.

Bebe says her husband got involved in family book sharing by default because she caught a cold and couldn't read to the boys for a few evenings. Since children typically spend the majority of their time with their mothers or with female teachers (90% of elementary school teachers are female), it's especially important that fathers take an active role in family book sharing. Fathers' participation counteracts the idea that books and reading are "just for girls."

- ***Don't let your sharing session become just another reading lesson.*** If you want your kids to talk to you, you have to adopt a conversational tone that shows you are sharing and not lecturing. Don't test your kids. Rather, make leading observations like "I wonder why this happened?" or "Boy, that would scare me if I had been there!" or "If that had happened to us, how do you think we would have reacted?"

## General Guidelines for Book-Sharing Conversations

The following tips can help you start book-sharing conversations with your kids and will also enable you to keep conversations rolling once they start.

- ***Avoid dead-end questions.*** If you want to start a conversation with your child, avoid questions that require a "yes" or "no" or a single right answer in response. Ask questions that begin with "how" or "why." Don't be afraid to ask your kid questions to which you don't know the answer. Your goal in these conversations is to share with, not to test, your child.

- ***Repeat and extend your child's statements.*** Often just repeating the last few words of your child's statement can serve as an invitation for her to explain or elaborate on what she has said. Or, you might pick up on some part of your child's conversation and extend it. If your child says something like "*Where the Wild Things Are* is my favorite book" you might say, "What happens in *The Wild Things* that makes it your favorite?" When you incorporate your child's own words into your reaction, you strengthen her confidence in her own verbal skills and you let her know that her opinions and ideas are valued.

- ***Share your own thoughts and reactions to books.*** Since our children usually take their first cues about how to behave from us, you can encourage your child to express his opinions about what you read together by voicing your own reactions. For example, if you and your child were discussing the novel *Hatchet* you might express a personal reaction by saying, "I wonder if I would have been watching the controls and instruments well enough to crash-land that plane and survive."

- ***Define and reflect feelings.*** If your child is hesitant to articulate her reactions to books, you might help her define and talk about her feelings by making a guess about what is going on with her. For instance, if your child seems particularly upset by an event in a book, you might say something like "You look worried. Does this story remind you of your first day at school?" This soft approach is more likely to get a child to talk about her feelings than directly asking, "What's wrong?"

- ***Observe cues.*** Your child will probably give you hints that let you know when he is ready to end a conversation. When he starts staring into space or giving really silly responses, it's probably time to stop.

## Guidelines for Action

Here are some ideas that will help you communicate with your child.

1. All kids want their parents and grandparents to pay attention to them. When you offer to read one of their books or magazines, "Just so I can talk to you," you show your kids that you want to know more about them as people.

2. To talk comfortably, parent and child need a common interest. A novel or a short story gives you an immediate common interest. The story line forms your interest—you don't have to fake interest in some current childhood fad.

3. You can read aloud to kids of all ages. One way to get started is simply to read a few pages to your child. "What do you think of the way this story begins?" High school kids seem to enjoy listening to stories as much as younger kids.

4. Initially ask your child to choose the book that you both will read. Later you may want to use other guidelines, but at first you want to make sure that your child has a book or a topic that will appeal to him. Most parents find that they actually enjoy the books their children choose.

5. Show respect for the ideas and opinions of your child. Without a doubt, that means listen to your child and respond positively to some aspect of what she says. Communication will cease in a hurry if the child feels that most of her ideas are being rejected or ridiculed. You may certainly express your own opinions, but your purpose here is not to win arguments; it is to hear and understand the ideas of your child.

6. Express your own ideas as opinions, not as laws. Since your discussion starts with incidents in a book, you can say: "In my opinion, he acted inappropriately." Your child may disagree with your opinion, but the playing field for the two of you allows equal time for opinions about what is happening in the book.

7. Build an atmosphere for sharing ideas. Outside of reading a book together, ask for your child's opinion on all kinds of things that go on in the country, in the neighborhood, in the home. "What would you do about that if you were principal of the school?" And try to learn why your child gives the opinion that he does.

8. Make time. Find time. Your child will recognize your effort to find a few minutes for her several times a week. She will respect the effort you made to put her in an important place in your life, a time when you shared ideas together.

9. Invest in yourself. Besides the books you read with your children, read to make yourself a better person, a better parent, a better worker. Listen to audiotapes or watch videotapes or attend workshops that will build your knowledge and your skills.

10. Get help from local resources. Form a mutual help group. Librarians, teachers, bookstore personnel, counselors, and church leaders are all at your service. Talk to them and ask for ideas and for guidance. You may find all the help you need in a group of parents who, like you, want to improve family communication and are willing to form a mutual help group.

Maybe you have already taken the first step and begun to read and share books with your kids. If you have, you know that maintaining your commitment to family book sharing is going to take some determination. Most of us find that our determination is bolstered by those friends and family members who take the time to listen to us talk about our current struggles and then offer an encouraging word. You probably will find it easier to make reading a family habit if there are some other adults with whom you can compare notes and share your experiences. One way to start a mutual support group is to pass this book along to a friend or a neighbor whose family might also be interested in reading and sharing books.

There is, however, a more reliable way for you to enlist the kind of support that will help you get book sharing to really work in your family. If you think you would find sharing your experiences with other parents to be motivational, I strongly encourage you to start the wheels moving toward getting a family book club started in your community. Consider recruiting the aid of

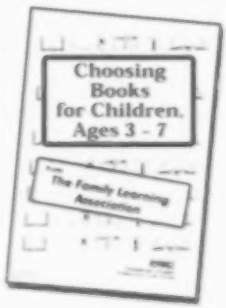
- your child's teacher.
- your child's Boy Scout or Girl Scout troop leader.
- the education director at a local church or synagogue.
- an active member of a single parents' support group.
- PTA/O volunteers.
- the children's librarian at your local library.

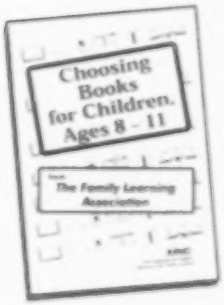
Family book sharing really encourages everybody to get in on the act because it builds bridges of communication between parents and children, between home and school. And there really is something in it for everybody. It's surprising that such a simple idea can have such powerful effects. Give it a try and see for yourself.

# More Help in Choosing Books

Three additional booklets are available to help you select specific books for children in various age groups. You can begin by consulting the one that fits your child's age and then continue with the later age groups if that meets your needs. In each book you will find brief descriptions of a number of books appropriate for each age group, followed by a lengthy list of additional titles for you to consider.

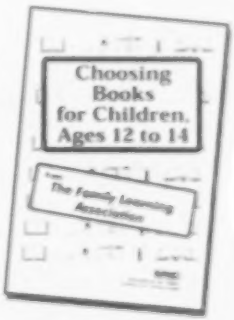
**Choosing Books for Children, Ages 3 to 7**
Use this resource to appeal to a variety of interests in your kindergarten to primary-age children. Filled with great tips for keeping the book-conversations going, this book pinpoints a vast array of age-appropriate reading materials.




**Choosing Books for Children, Ages 8 to 11**
Quick summaries of a huge collection of titles will make it easy to provide good reading for your pre-teens. Top-notch authors, relevant themes, and sensitive issues make this a good companion at the library or bookstore.

**Choosing Books for Children, Ages 12 to 14**
Let literature open up discussion about some of the difficult issues your teen is experiencing. Includes a special section on communicating about books though writing and journaling.




For information about these and other helpful books, contact:
**The Family Learning Association**
3925 Hagan Street, Suite 101, Bloomington, Indiana 47401
**1.800.759.4723** www.kidscanlearn.com

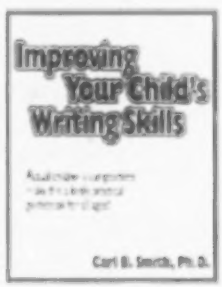
## Other Resources Available

### Tutoring Children in Reading and Writing

**Book 1: Kindergarten**
**Book 2: Grades 1-2**

These guidebooks use a hands-on approach to helping children improve essential skills. Using easy and effective activities, they focus on the building blocks of reading and writing with sample worksheets that focus on letter recognition, spelling, phonics, and comprehension.

### Improving Your Child's Writing Skills




Using actual children's compositions, this fun guidebook takes kids through the entire process of writing, from Pre-Writing and Drafting to Revising and Proofreading. The practical work sheets form a framework to hone the skills of any young writer.

## Helping Children to Learn SERIES

***Improving Reading and Learning*** ***Reading to Learn***
***Phonics and Other Word Skills*** ***Creating Life-Long Readers***
***The Self-Directed Learner***

For information about these and other helpful books, contact:
**The Family Learning Association**
3925 Hagan Street, Suite 101, Bloomington, Indiana 47401
**1.800.759.4723** www.kidscanlearn.com



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## Phonics Plus, Books A, B, and C

***developed by The Family Learning Association***

These three books help children learn to discriminate sound-symbol correspondences by listening, saying, seeing, and writing letters of the alphabet with illustrated writing and fill in the blank activities. Book A is appropriate for kindergart-ners and first-graders. Book B is for 1st–2nd grade, and Book C is for 2nd–3rd grade.

## Spelling for Writing, Books 1 – 5

This series of student workbooks provide all the direction needed to lead kids through the basic spelling patterns of English. By following the weekly lesson plans, you can improve spelling accuracy and the clarity of all written messages. Full of delightful line drawings that illustrate the words being learned, each book is crafted for the age-appropriate level.

For information about these and other helpful books, contact:
**The Family Learning Association**
3925 Hagan Street, Suite 101, Bloomington, Indiana 47401
**1.800.759.4723** www.kidscanlearn.com



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# Start a conversation that will last a lifetime.

## Talk to your children about books—their books and your books.

"Your children's perception of your attitude about books sets the stage for—

- School success,
- Sense of critical thinking,
- Positive learning habits."

*—Parent Sharing Books study, Family Literacy Center*

**In this book, learn:**

- Five easy techniques to prompt book discussions,
- Guidelines for selecting books,
- How to make it a two-way discussion,
- Plus motivation, values, and making it fun.

Collect all four books in the Series!

- *How to Talk to Your Child About Books*
- *Choosing Books for Your Child, Ages 3 to 7*
- *Choosing Books for Your Child, Ages 8 to 11*
- *Choosing Books for Your Child, Ages 12 to 14*

**The Family Learning Association**
**1.800.759.4723 ● www.kidscanlearn.com**